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| <p>The Live Stream Contribution of Nexhmije Zaimi to Journalism and to the Albanian Diaspora in USA</p> |  | <p>Linguistics</p> <p>Keywords: Journalist, courageous, perseverance, environment, democracy, marriage.</p> |
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Abstract

The famous Albanian-American investigative journalist Nexhmije Zaimi is one of the most outstanding figures of the first generation intelligence of the Albanian diaspora in the U.S A. She is at the same time the only Albanian female of 1930s who distinguished her name in the Albanian-American community's intellectual circles, being affirmed as a senior journalist - a rare opportunity for an Albanian woman at that time. She had a long active life, filled with activities, but also with a lot of difficulties. Since her early youth, she boldly challenged the patriarchal environment, refused arranged marriage with a man of a much greater age, and alone by herself crossed the ocean to find her freedom, to build a new independent life in a place of true democracy in the U.S.A. She was graduated brilliantly in prestigious higher educational institutions of America. Thanks to the perseverance, character set, talent and hard work, she became determined and courageous disciple of free speech in defence of the truth anywhere it was being raised to the level of the most famous American media journalists and the world. It was the first, model to be followed by later Albanian-American journalist of our day, as a journalist, of "Los Angeles Times".

Introduction

Nexhmije Zaimi (1914/7 – 2003) and Eric Margolis (1943) (Mother and son)



The famous Albanian-American investigative journalist Nexhmije Zaimi is one of the most outstanding figures of the first generation intellectuals of the Albanian Diaspora in the U.S. At the same time she is the only Albanian female of 1930s who distinguished her name in the Albanian-American community's intellectual circles, being affirmed as an esteemed journalist - a rare opportunity for an Albanian woman of that time. Her long and active life was filled with endeavours and difficulties. From a very early age, she boldly challenged the patriarchal environment around her, refused an arranged marriage with a much older man, travelled alone across the Atlantic Ocean to find freedom and build a new independent life in the land of true democracy, the United States of America. She went on to be educated on some of the most prestigious American educational institutions with exceptional results. Thanks to her perseverance, ardent character, talent and undeterred working ethic, she became a staunch disciple of free speech in defense of the truth, reaching the levels of some of the most famous media journalists from America and from around the world. She was the first but opened the way and inspired a new generation of Albanian-American journalists such as the "Los Angeles Times" Rouz Dosti, media journalist Lidia Ujkaj, TV producer Tara Nikaj, Marina Vataj - former New York Post reporter and publisher of electronic newsletters, etc.

Early life

Nexhmije Zaimi was born in 1914 (May 1917 according to her) in the surroundings of Libohova and grew up there, later being also raised in Tirana. According to the memoirs of her grandson Mr. Fatos Zaimi, given to the newspaper "The Telegraph"¹³⁶, Nexhmije was born in Prevezë but after the city was occupied by Greece; her family was displaced to Vlora and later to Tirana. She passed away in her nineties, on the 18th of April 2003 in Santa Barbara, California.

Nexhmije and her brother Mehmet were among the first six students who attended the high school opened by the American Presbyterian missionaries in Albania. While still a teenager, her conservative parents tried to marry her off against her will. She left home and first went to Italy and from there on to the U.S.A. Her knowledge of the English language helped her to quickly become an American citizen and to pursue higher studies at the Wellesley College, becoming the first Albanian to graduate from this prestigious college.

Marriage and divorce

Later on majored in journalism at the Graduate School of Journalism of Columbia University in New York. There, she was acquainted with lawyer and businessman Henry M. Margolis whom she married in the 1940s. "Their marriage was short-lived, and its product was a child born in February 1943 whom they named Eric Skënerbeg Margolis. "So, me - their only son"¹³⁷ - says her son.

A divorce followed in the beginning of the 1950s but Nexhmije kept close contact with her son Eric Skënderbeg Margolis throughout her life. As if by destiny both mother and son would become internationally renowned journalists.

In 1937 she wrote her autobiography *Daughter of the Eagle: The Autobiography of an Albanian Girl*. The book was an instant success and became a best-seller of 1938. This excellent autobiographical work was only translated into Albanian much later on the 21st century.¹³⁸

Latter years, occupation and challenges

During the Second World War she worked for the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), the predecessor of the CIA. After the war she played a great role in matters relating to the Albanian-American community. During this time she was also elected as the President of the Pan-Albanian Confederation "Vatra", assisting Albanian political migrants as well as supporting her family back in Albania to the best of her abilities. Soon after the war, she left her academic duties and national intelligence related commitments to go to Italy to be engaged in the betterment of the social status of thousands of Albanian refugees, who had escaped the oppression and violence of the Communist regime. She became a key figure in lobbying at the White House and American Congress in the matters relating to the persecution faced by Albanians in the former Yugoslavia.

Having gone to Italy, Nexhmije spent some time in Calabria researching and investigating the Arbëresh Albanian tribe's history and their middle age dialect. It was in particular her outstanding role in supporting the refugees that led Nexhmije to be granted the role of "Comandatoressa della Corona d'Italia", meaning "Commander of the Italian Red Cross" and was honored by one of the highest honorary medals in Italy. Throughout the years that she served in that region, Nexhmije also took meticulous records that give a complete and chronicled account of her activities in Italy after the Second World War. Considering the short distance between Italy and Albania, it's a great surprise that her actions are rarely heard of by her compatriots, if known at all.

Nexhmije's relationship with her family in Tirana always remained affectionate, even though she did not see them for decades, her memories of Albania and her love of her family remained unabated. She lived in constant fear for her family due to the risk of them being arrested, tortured or even killed by the state secret services as a retribution

¹³⁶Newspaper "TELEGRAF", 8 March 2012, p. 4.

¹³⁷ARS. - p. 6, 29 June, 2003, p. 20.

¹³⁸Zaimi, Nexhmije, "Bija e shqipes: autobiografia e një vajze shqiptare", Shtëpia Botuese Plejad, Tiranë, 2007, p.190; 21 cm. Translated. Erinda Rusi, Adriatik Lami (red.)

for her political involvements in matters relating to Albanians in the USA. In many of her analytical and journalistic works in the American media, such as the CNN, while vehemently promoting Albanian values, she equally denounced the Communist regime that came in power in Albania after the Second World War and never cut her connections with her motherland, stating her pride in being Albanian wherever she went.

Nexhmije reporting from Middle East

During the early 1950s Nexhmije Zaimi Margolis became one of the first American female journalists to report from the Middle East, interviewing leaders such as the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat, as well as King Hussein of Jordan, noting an interesting fact that King Hussein's royal guard consisted of sixty Albanians. Her son Eric, writes on this meeting:

As the full interview with the King of Jordan will be conveyed to the American media, Nexhmije Zaimi would write about her impressions from the first meeting with the head of this Arab country. "We got along right away" wrote the Albanian journalist. "He was very kind when we talked and occasionally when he considered certain things he said important, he would repeat them twice, so that the message would be portrayed in full and unaltered for the average reader". In addition to the memories on the discussion with King Hussein, she points out a detail regarding her leaving moments. "When we finished the interview, King Hussein insisted that he escorts me to the entrance of the palace. He even emphasized that he had reserved a surprise for me, the Albanian journalist that had come so far for his opinion. While we were walking down the stairs, there were sixty tall guards standing at attention wearing the ceremonial uniform to honor us. He told me that I can speak to the guards. "In English?", I said. "No, in Albanian" he replied, stopping in front of them. "Albanian?!" "Yes, yes Albanian" insisted King Hussein. "How is that possible?", I asked surprised. "They are all Albanian," pointing out the surprise that he had planned as our farewell. When I asked why he had chosen Albanian guards in particular, King Hussein explained that they are most loyal and brave"¹³⁹

She was also one of the first journalists to write and lecture on the situation of the Palestinian refugees, informing the American public for the first time of their difficult plight. She delivered a study to the U.S. State Department in which she warned that if a solution is not found on the situation of the Palestinian refugees, then the case would explode in America's hands within 50 years. Coincidentally, or simply by her prediction, the 11th September happened exactly half a century after her repeated warnings. Nexhmije Zaimi was a distinguished journalist and presenter for the CNN and Voice of America.

She was forced to leave her career as a journalist and political analyst as the media that published her writings started to be pressured into blocking her articles. She received continuous death threats that would threaten her and her son's life.

Health problems

During this time she started writing a new book but had to set it aside due to a severe case of glaucoma that seriously damaged her sight. In the meantime she worked extensively with the Albanian community in New York and New Jersey, translated for the New York Criminal Court and was involved in different activities helping war refugees from Europe. For short periods of time she also lived in Paris, Rome, Geneva and Cairo but her permanent residence was Manhattan.

Nexhmije Zaimi was a powerful voice in the U.S. against the communist regime in Albania. Her home in Manhattan, New York was always filled with journalists, artists, writers, diplomats, representatives of the United Nations, as well visitors from Europe and the Middle East.

In the 1980s, having nearly gone completely blind she sadly withdrew from her active life in New York and moved to a quiet community in Santa Barbara, California. Near her nineties, she took under her guardianship three children from Kosovo who had been seriously injured in an accident during the NATO bombings. She continued to gradually write her second book until she closed her eyes for one last time, having remained proud and defiant until death when her tired body had to release her persevering and eager soul on the dawn of the 18th of April, the spring of 2003.

¹³⁹ Panorama. - p. 1386, 4 Augustt, 2006, page. 26.

When the most prestigious American media praised Naxhmie Zaimi's contribution as an acclaimed journalist and political analyst, when Italy honored her with the chivalric title of "Commander Knight of the Crown of Italy", then rightly so the Albanian-American community named her "Prima Donna - First Lady of Albania".

According to the impressions given by Eric Skënderbeg we also learn that Nexhmie had also been a close friend of Queen Geraldine before she enjoined the monarchy privileges and loved her like a real sister.¹⁴⁰

Her associations and connections with personalities such as Abaz Kupi, Fan Noli, Faik Konica, etc gave her mission a prominent national content. She met Fan Noli for the first time in the city of Vlora, while Konica in Washington, when he had just arrived from Albania.

We can see her emotions when she thinks back of the first time she met Fan Noli:

"It was in April 1924 that I first met Noli in the city of Vlora. He had come there to attend the funeral processions of Avni Rustemi. Driven in the carriage to the funeral were me and my parents as well as the mother of Avni Rustemi, who would occasionally sob and weep. This unfortunate circumstance became the reason that I was introduced to Fan Noli, who was deeply saddened with the sudden loss of Avni, who according to Noli, was a rare patriot. I remember during those days, my mother Sherife covered the windows in our house with black curtains. Meanwhile, Avni's mother stayed at our house for many days to come."¹⁴¹

As written by Naxhmie Zaimi, she would get to meet Noli several times later on in New York, and would together become some of the key advocates of the "Vatra" federation. However, the first meeting at Avni Rustemi's funeral would remain unforgettable.⁶

Besides her personal impressions of the meetings with Konica, she emphasizes the considerations of a number of American senators and congressmen, who had claimed that among foreign individuals in the USA, Konica is incomparable in his diplomatic skills, personality, conduct and sense of humor. It was quite significant for them that he would show up dressed in the Albanian national costume during diplomatic meetings.

Awards and decorations

On the 8th of March 2012, the President of Albania Mr. Bamir Topi decorated Nexhmie Zaimi with the Order of "Mother Teresa" acknowledging: *"One of the brightest examples throughout the difficult path of the emancipation of the Albanian woman that arose above the mentality of patriarchal society and became a prominent social activist and an eminent professional in the field of journalism."*

The portrait of Naxhmie Zaimi would not be complete without touching upon her son's profile, Eric Skënderbeg Margolis. And that for a few reasons: First, they were both acclaimed investigative journalists of international fame.

Second, the close relationship of mother and son continued throughout their lives and was key to the influence, that lead her son to become a journalist, in the formation of his brave and unyielding character, in molding his love for his mothers homeland, Albania, and with love for Albanians wherever they were. These are the reasons Eric Skënderbeg claims: "I'm Albanian! And I'm proud of this. Even more so when I consider my mother the daughter of Libohova, who made a name of herself in America. I dedicate everything in my life and profession to my mother."¹⁴² Thirdly, Eric Skënderbeg became the first biographer of his mother, therefore it's only natural for us to use his notes in building a full portrait of Nexhmie Zaimi, the captivating life facts and her journalistic activity.

Her only son

Eric Skënderbeg Margolis was born in New York City on the 4th of February 1943. By now we already know that his mother was an extraordinary investigative journalist and author. His father was a businessman, restaurateur, theatre producer and investor. Eric is a graduate of the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at

¹⁴⁰ Panorama. - p. 1387, 5 August, 2006, p. 25, V; XXVII,5,a

¹⁴¹ Panorama. - p. 1386, 4 August, 2006, p. 27

¹⁴² Panorama. - p. 1387, 5 August, 2006, p. 24 – 25, V; XXVII,5,a

Georgetown University, the University of Geneva and New York University. He served as a U.S. soldier in the Vietnam War. His career as a journalist is multifaceted and exceptional.

Eric Margolis is generally unknown in Albania and among the Albanian media, while in the international realm he is already considered amongst the elite of journalists as one of the bravest reporters who has covered more than fifteen armed conflicts, while being present in even the most dangerous scenes of war. This Albanian who unites his journalistic mission with that of a soldier, has collected a detailed chronicle of conflicts starting with countries such as Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Vietnam, Kurdistan, Chechnya, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Bosnia, Serbia and Iraq, concluding with an encyclopedian understanding of these modern military conflicts.

The fact that his articles and reports were destined to and valued by some of the most prestigious media outlets such as CNN, FOX, CBC, CTV, British SKY etc., as well as the most renowned newspapers of the United States, Canada, Great Britain where he still continues to be considered amongst the most prominent journalists, shows the professional capacity of this champion of free speech, who likes to boast of his Albanian heritage.

"I've inherited two precious things from my mother Naxhmie" he says. "Firstly, from early childhood she instilled in me a pure love for Albania. Next, Naxhmie inspired me passionately on journalism as an honourable and delicate profession with all its risks and rewards. It was particularly due to my mother's wish to bequeath her profession that I studied at Georgetown University in Washington and later at the New York University. I published the first writing in 1960 while studying in Switzerland then followed by a few publications in the *Daily Gleaner* of Jamaica. I began to publish in the U.S press in 1983 in the opinion pages and editorials of the *New York Times* and later in the *International Herald Tribune*. Since 1983 I've had my personal column in the Toronto Sun newspaper of Canada, meanwhile I appear regularly on CNN and other key American channels."¹⁴³

In one of the articles published in *The Toronto Star* on the 8th of June 2007, Eric Skënderbeg wrote: "In 1961 I went to Spain to visit my godfather, Count Ilyas Toptani, who had married the Duchess of Valencia. This fierce, regal woman, was a leader of the Carlists, Spain's royalist party. They were in residence at one of the Countess' castles, this one in Avila, surrounded by an entourage of priests, duenas, liveried servants and assorted flunkies. It was all wonderfully medieval. The duchess and fellow Carlists had attempted a coup against Spain's dictator, Gen. Francisco Franco. They seized Madrid airport, and waited for Spain's exiled king, Don Juan, to fly in from Portugal. But Don Juan got cold feet and returned to Lisbon, claiming bad weather. The Duchess grabbed the air controller's microphone, according to Count Toptani, and furiously yelled at the king, 'Your majesty, a king should die for his country, not a country for its king!' Soon after, she was imprisoned. I mention this piquant story because today another military ruler, Pakistan's President-General Pervez Musharraf, seems prepared to see his nation destroyed rather than lose his grip on power."¹⁴⁴

Regarding his mother, he highlights the following:

"Nexhmije was very cultured; she loved classical music, opera and theater. She fed me with that same love for music and later enrolled me to a music school. Even in her nineties, my mother was full of energy and passion. "I'm a young girl, within the body of an old woman", she would say. Her wits remained as sharp as in her youth. She always had the fighting spirit. She was disappointed that I was not married and didn't have children. Heartbroken that Albanians didn't work together for their nation. She loved New York passionately although she spent her last days in Santa Barbara, California, she considered herself a New Yorker. She defended Albania, Kosovo and Arab states until the day she died. And only died because her weakened body surrendered. "Her heart, her Albanian heart, was as strong as a young girl's", would say the doctor..."

Eric Skënderbeg Margolis' published works include: 1. *War at the Top of the World: The Struggle for Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Tibet* (ISBN 0-415-93062-6) Routledge 1999; and 2. *American Raj: The West and the*

¹⁴³ Panorama. - p. 1387, 5 August, 2006, p. 24 – 25, V; XXVII,5,a

¹⁴⁴ Panorama. - p. 1386, 4 August, 2006, p. 26 – 27.

Muslim World (ISBN 1-554-70087-6) Key Porter September, 2008 which was shortlisted as a finalist in the 2009 Governor General's Award in Non-Fiction.

Eric Margolis is also known in the political midst as the first journalists that predicted the consequences of the violent breakup of Yugoslavia and the tragic conflict of Kosovo in the middle of the '90s. A conclusion he would come to not only for his feeling of being Albanian but also due to his extensive experience in covering the regional and ethnic conflicts and the recognition of the Serbian regime's fascist and chauvinistic tendencies. "Regarding the dangers of a genocide committed by Milosevic, recalls Eric, I have warned since 1989, immediately after his speech in Fushe Kosovo. I had to be completely objective in my analysis while suppressing my own feelings as an Albanian, to protect the values of my profession. What I felt, I expressed openly, but the reaction came late, resulting in great costs." This important voice of the western media would not be immune to the extreme nationalist movements who did everything to silence and even annihilate him.

Even so, Eric was able to escape the attempts that were made on his life because of his profession and his devotion to free speech and remains a valuable asset to the media. His experience and career is a great treasure of Albanian identity. Now he lives in Canada with his wife, surrounded by the respect and love of many Albanian immigrants in Canada.

Conclusion

If we are to analyze the past from a historical perspective, we can conclude that the first generation of Albanian immigrants in the English-speaking countries belonged to the working class. However, we always notice their urge and hope for a better future that was deeply embedded in their consciousness and logic. Specifically, we notice their unwavering determination and work ethic, their desire to integrate in society by respecting the laws of the land, their regard for family values and insatiable love for their motherland. Many times, they encounter great difficulties but overcome them through hard work. One step at a time though, they forged prosperous communities within the first generation of children born in their country of immigration.

The enthusiasm of the first and second generations towards their achievements becomes the food for their souls that awakens and enlightens them. Amongst the second generation we also notice a desire for them to return to their roots and learn about the origin of their predecessors and connect with the homeland.

As an illustration, we can mention the Nobel laureate Ferid Murad, who came to Llakavicë in Gostivar to help his American daughter adopt a three-month old girl. Actor Jim Belushi has returned repeatedly to his father's homeland after his first visit and declares enthusiastically <<I am Albanian!>>.

In this research paper we have only selected two figures amongst hundreds, whose work and ingenuity establishes them among those in the highest pedestals of the world.

The chain of famous Albanian figures constitutes a valuable contribution in many areas of life while also being a clear example of their full integration in their respective societies. In this long chain of prominent figures of the Albanian Diaspora, in addition to the ones we have covered in this paper, we can mention many others who have not been subject to this academic research piece, such as: William Gregory - astronaut, USA; Valbona Çoba - model, actress, USA; Masiela Lusha - model, actress, USA; Mariela Cingo - a young Albanian pianist living in London, United Kingdom; Ardian Harri - an Albanian professor at State University of Mississippi in the department of agricultural economics, USA; Stefi Gjine - tennis player, Canada; Astrit Zejnati - dancer, Arizona, USA; Hila Popaj - former actor U.S. (Chinatown); Marina Malota - actress U.S.; Laureta Meci - actress U.S.; Elona Bojaxhi - actress, models, U.S.; Mirela Tafaj - soprano, Canada; Tania Doko - singer, Australia; James Bieber - actor, USA; Emina Cunmulaj - models U.S.; Donald Lambro - journalist, U.S.; Richard Lukaj - economist, Wall Street, USA; Agim Kaba - actor U.S. ; Alex Buzo - one of Australia's most famous playwrights; and many other names that will surely be the object of another study. This field is dynamic and limitless.

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